

Edition

Working paper

Foreign Policy Orientations
in Slovakia

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Bratislava, October 2000

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Attitudes of the Slovak public towards foreign policy issues

(Results of public opinion polls)

1. Development of attitudes towards the EU and NATO during the past decade

The confidence in the European Union and NATO (see graph 1 and graph 2) and later the support for entry into these institutions were two major indicators of the foreign policy attitudes of the Slovak public and their development during the 90s. Originally, the public did not show a major support for these institutions and many people were not able to take a stance on foreign policy issues. This lack of clear positions on foreign policy gave the political elite a free hand in making strategic decisions as well as the possibility to shape the opinions of the public.

Already in the early 90s, political party preferences played a dominant role in determining trust or mistrust in EU and NATO. At the same time, there was a very weak or no value polarization among those who trusted and those who mistrusted the two international institutions.

The next phase of transition already took place under the newly gained independence of Slovakia and under the lead of the political elite from HZDS (broad centrist movement with authoritarian and populist appeals) and SNS (right-wing party with nationalistic profile). The majority of the public still not ready to take a decisive stands on future foreign policy orientation of Slovakia. Although only a very marginal part of the population preferred orientation toward Russia, a pro-Western orientation did not clearly prevail either. The public support for Euro-Atlantic institutions was not clearly structured upon the social and demographic background and value profiles, as it was the case later.

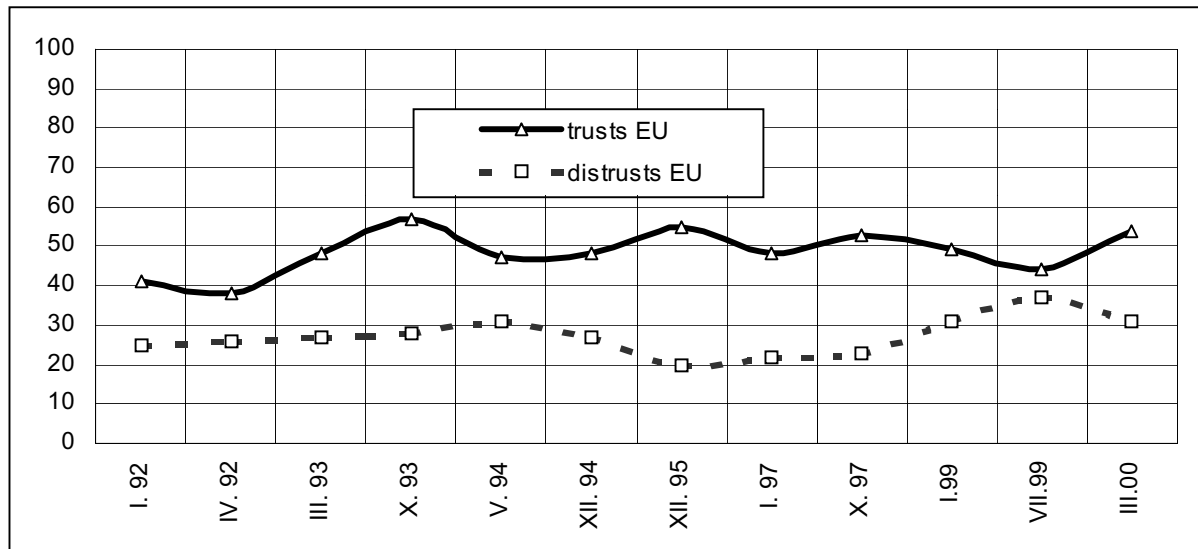
Only toward the end of 1993 did all major Slovak political streams reach a consensus on the need for a pro-Western orientation that was also supported by the majority of the Slovak media. The public reacted positively to this development that translated into increased support and confidence in NATO and EU.

The period after an early parliamentary election in 1994 (the coalition led by HZDS and Prime Minister Mečiar came to power) was filled with contradictory developments in the Slovak foreign policy. Even though most of the ruling coalition representatives declared their intention to gain full membership of Slovakia in the EU and NATO, they did not prove sufficient willingness to reach this goal. The government declarations were contradicted by repeated violations of democratic norms, negating any chance the country had to join Euro-Atlantic institutions. In July 1997, the NATO members agreed on their summit in Madrid that Slovakia should not be included in the first wave of NATO enlargement. Furthermore, in December 1997, the summit of the EU relegated Slovakia to a second, slower track toward EU membership.

At the level of the general public perception the foreign policy orientations and values of the public started to become more pronounced and two contradictory streams began to take shape that can be identified as isolationists and integrationists develop. The isolationists can be described as people who tend to disagree with the political and economic transition and with the integration of Slovakia into international political, economic, and security structures. Demographically, this group consists mostly of elderly people, less educated people, manual workers, and people from smaller towns and villages. The integrationists are to be found. These people tend to be more open to modernity and globalization, and they tend to support the transition, as well as the integration of Slovakia into key international bodies. Demographically, this group mostly consists of younger people, people with higher education, professionals, and people from larger towns and cities. Both groups correspond to the main and deep social fissure according to a political affiliation. The isolationists tend to support HZDS and SNS, the integrationists mostly include the supporters of parties that belonged to the opposition during 1994-98 and since 1998 form the governing coalition (SDK, SDL, SOP, and Hungarian parties).

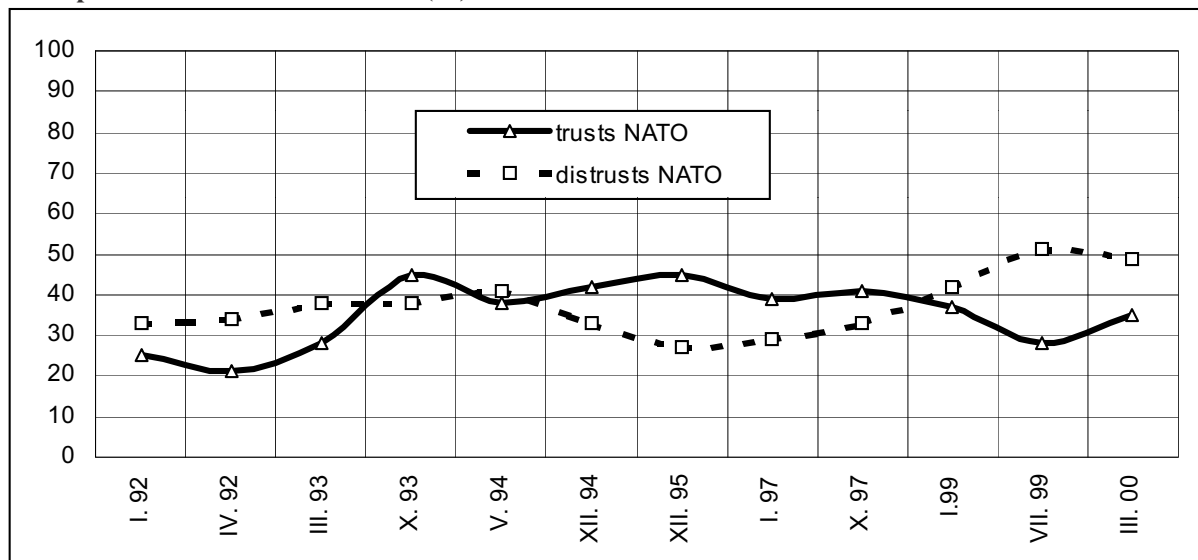
The new government that resulted from the parliamentary elections in the fall of 1998 immediately began to implement active policies in line with its Euro-Atlantic ambitions. This change put the country back on track toward NATO and EU membership. The image of Slovakia abroad has dramatically improved and Slovakia began to regain the lost ground.

Graph 1
Development of confidence in the EU (%)



Source: CSA 1992, FOCUS 1993-1995; Institute for Public Affairs 1997–2000

Graph 2
Development of confidence in NATO (%)



Source: CSA 1992, FOCUS 1993-1995; Institute for Public Affairs 1997–2000

As shown in Graphs 1 and 2 during the 1990s, the Slovak public has held quite different attitudes toward the EU and toward NATO throughout 1990s. Most of the population has trusted the EU and the supporters of Slovakia's accession into the EU have historically outnumbered its opponents. The support and confidence in the EU has fluctuated only mildly. On the other hand, the attitudes of the Slovak public toward NATO have been much more ambivalent and the support and confidence in NATO has fluctuated more dramatically.

2. Shifts in the public opinion after the 1998 elections and the Kosovo crisis

After the 1998 elections, there was an interesting development of public opinion on the integration of Slovakia into the EU and NATO. A majority of the population felt that the results of the elections increased the chances of Slovakia's membership in NATO and the EU. However, the portion of the population supporting the membership decreased. (See table 1) The support for EU membership declined only slightly, with the majority of the population

still in favor of the EU entry and only a small minority against it. The decrease in support for NATO membership was more significant. In January 1999, only four months after the elections, the numbers were approximately equal and in June 1999, those disagreeing with Slovakia's membership in NATO outnumber the supporters of NATO entry. Such a development was apparently paradoxical because the support decreased after a visible foreign policy successes of the new government. These opinion shifts can be largely explained by a much more open questioning of the benefits of Slovakia's integration into the transatlantic structures by the representatives of HZDS and SNS, after the parties moved to parliamentary opposition. Many supporters of these parties consequently reacted by withdrawing their support for both integration goals. Since March 2000, the support for NATO entry started "to recover" noticeably and in August 2000, 50% of the Slovak population supports Slovakia's integration into NATO and 39% oppose it.

Table 1

"Do you support the entry of Slovakia into the EU and NATO?" (% answers "yes" : "no" : "do not know")

	January 1999	June 1999	October 1999	March 2000	August 2000
EÚ	64 : 22:14	66 : 24 : 10	66 : 25 : 9	70 : 20 : 10	72 : 19 : 9
NATO	42 : 41:17	35 : 53 : 12	39 : 50 : 11	42 : 47 :11	50 : 39 : 11

Source: Institute for Public Affairs, January 1999 – August 2000

In 1998, there was a wide social consensus on the need of Slovakia's integration into the EU among the adherents of all political parties. After the 1998 elections, the support for EU membership among HZDS voters dropped most significantly, as the HZDS voters were no longer "confused" by the officially proclaimed foreign policy goals of the former HZDS government. After HZDS moved into the opposition, a majority of its supporters began to openly opposed Slovakia's integration into the West.

A similar political split took place with regard to NATO membership. Table 3 shows that in January 1999, the proportion of the supporters of NATO membership was higher than the proportion of its opponents among the voters of all political parties. However, in June 1999 this was true only of the supporters of SMK and SDK. Among the voters of SOP and SDL the proportions of the supporters and opponents of NATO membership were approximately equal. Among the supporters of the opposition parties (HZDS and SNS) but also among the non-voters and undecided, opposition to NATO prevailed very noticeably. In June 1999, the support for Slovakia's membership in NATO dropped among the voters of SOP, SNS, HZDS, as well as among the non-voters and the undecided. (Bútorová 1999: 2-3)

Table 2

"Do you support the entry of Slovakia into the EU?" (according to political party support, in %)

	April 1998		January 1999		June 1999	
	"yes" and "slightly yes"	"no" and "slightly no"	"yes" and "slightly yes"	"no" and "slightly no"	"yes" and "slightly yes"	"no" and "slightly no"
SDK	92	2	87	4	86	9
SMK	89	4	78	3	84	7
SDL	85	13	80	13	84	12
SOP	91	5	83	6	84	13
Undecided	62	11	53	14	64	18
SNS	74	22	55	32	55	38
Non-voters	63	11	45	25	52	20
HZDS	76	18	36	51	42	48
Entire Population	79	11	62	22	66	24

Source: Institute for Public Affairs, April 1998 – June 1999

Note: "I don't know" responses account for the remainder (up to 100%).

Table 3

“Do you support the entry of Slovakia into the NATO?” (according to political party support, in %)

	April 1998		January 1999		June 1999	
	“yes” and “slightly yes”	“no” and “slightly no”	“yes” and “slightly yes”	“no” and “slightly no”	“yes” and “slightly yes”	“no” and “slightly no”
SMK	81	14	69	9	72	17
SDK	86	7	70	18	70	24
SOP	62	31	58	29	46	47
SDL	41	51	48	42	45	48
Undecided	43	26	30	35	21	50
Non-voters	44	28	26	44	19	53
SNS	41	51	27	60	17	78
HZDS	46	47	19	66	8	85
Entire Population	58	31	42	41	35	53

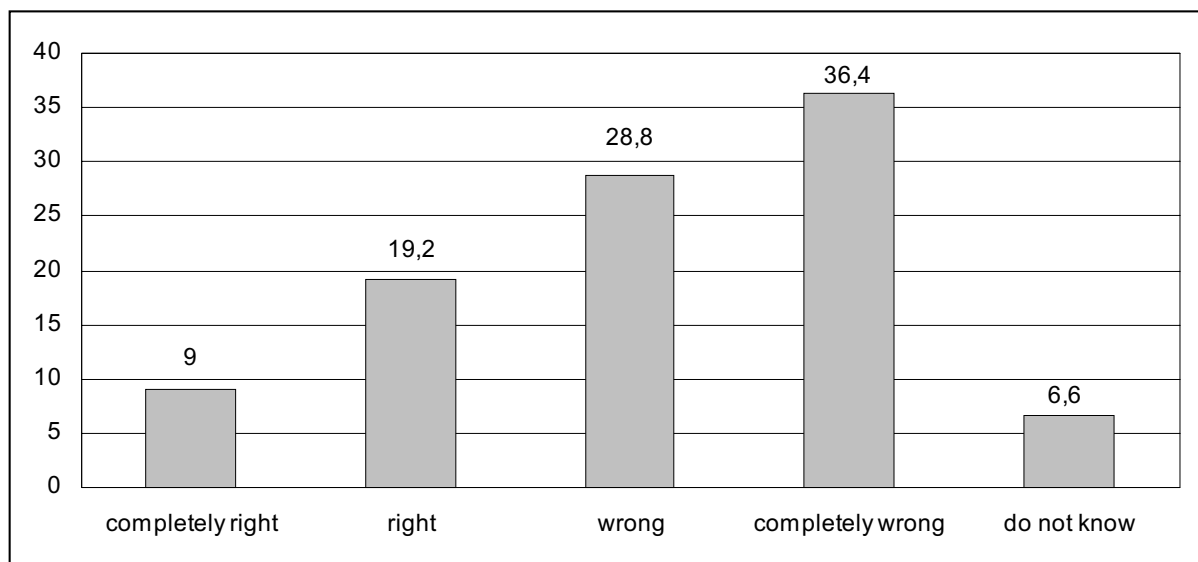
Note: “I don’t know” responses account for the remainder (up to 100%).

Source: Institute for Public Affairs, April 1998 – June 1999

Second important factor responsible for the drop in NATO membership support was the Kosovo crisis. After the president of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic, refused the Roubouillet peace accords, Western governments decided to launch air strikes against Yugoslavia. Graph 3 shows that the majority of the Slovak population considered these air strikes to wrong or completely wrong. On the other hand, only 28% of the population considered them to be right or completely right. Another 7% of the population was unable to take a position on this issue. These opinions were strongly politically polarized. While a majority of one part of the voters of the governing coalition – SDK and SMK – approved of the air strikes, the voters of the other part of the governing coalition – SOP and SDL – disagreed with this step. The strongest disagreement with the air strikes came from among the supporters of the parliamentary opposition – HZDS and SNS. (Gyárfášová – Velšic, 1999: 8)

Graph 3

“Several weeks ago Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic refused to sign a peace treaty that was supposed to arrange the relations between the Albanian Kosovars and the Yugoslav government. In response, the allied militaries of NATO decided to launch air strikes against military targets in Yugoslavia. Do you consider these air strikes ...” (%)



Source: Institute for Public Affairs, April 1999

Table 4

“Several weeks ago Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic refused to sign a peace treaty that was supposed to arrange the relations between the Albanian Kosovars and the Yugoslav government. In response, the allied militaries of NATO decided to launch air strikes against military targets in Yugoslavia. Do you consider these air strikes ...” (responses according to political party support, in %)

	Completely right or right	Completely wrong or wrong	Do not know
SMK	66,7	33,3	0,0
SDK	57,7	36,9	5,4
SDE	40,0	60,0	0,0
SOP	23,5	64,7	11,8
SNS	12,8	78,7	8,5
HZDS	5,6	91,7	2,8

Source: Institute for Public Affairs, April 1999

According to Table 5, 16% of the respondents used to support Slovakia's entry into the NATO but they changed their position because of the air strikes against Yugoslavia. This shift took place among the voters of all political parties but it was highest among the supporters of SNS and SOP. It can be explained in more detailed based on the results of an opinion poll conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs in June 1999. According to the poll results, the majority of citizens of Slovakia (53%) believe that the conflict between president Milosovic and the Albanian Kosovars was an internal affair of Yugoslavia and no one from outside of Yugoslavia has a right to interfere. Only 30% of the respondents disagreed with this statement. Another question – “The actions of NATO countries in Kosovo [NATO air strikes] was the right decision, because it is unacceptable that democratic countries should stand back and tolerate human rights violations” – produced symmetrically opposite results. Approximately 53% of the respondents disagreed with this statement, against 30% who agreed with it.

The results of these polls demonstrated that a significant part of the Slovak public had very conflicting opinions about the Kosovo conflict. A majority of the population (68%) ascribed the responsibility for the tragedy of the Albanian Kosovars to president Milosevic. Nevertheless, a majority of the respondents (68%) disagreed with NATO's military actions against Yugoslavia. The Slovak public also disagreed with the decision of the Slovak government to open Slovak air space to NATO aircrafts. Only 32% of polled citizens fully or partially agreed with government's decision while almost two thirds (64%) were against it. (Gyárfášová – Velšic, 1999: 8-9)

Table 5

“For several weeks NATO has been conducting air strikes against Yugoslavia. Did the Kosovo conflict influence your views on Slovakia's membership in NATO? If yes, how?” (%)

	I supported Slovakia's membership in NATO before, but now I think that Slovakia should not enter NATO.	I did not support Slovakia's membership in NATO before, but now I think that Slovakia should enter NATO.	Kosovo conflict did not influence my original conviction. I supported NATO membership both before and now.	Kosovo conflict did not influence my original conviction. I did not support NATO membership neither before nor now.	I don't know; I haven't thought about this.
Political party support					
SMK	14	1	62	5	17
SDK	16	4	56	13	12
SOP	20	2	33	28	18
SDE	16	2	28	32	23
Non-voters	10	1	16	33	40
SNS	24	0	15	52	8
Undecided	16	1	11	26	46
HZDS	18	2	4	57	20
Education attained					
Basic	15	2	20	33	30
Vocational	18	2	23	36	22
High school	15	2	32	32	18
College/ university	19	0	47	31	3
Ethnicity					
Slovak	16	2	23	37	22
Hungarian	13	1	55	7	25
Entire population	16	2	27	33	22

Source: Institute for Public Affairs, June 1999

3. Profile of Slovakia's integration supporters

According to a poll conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs in March 2000, the support for the EU and NATO entry among the Slovak public slightly increased. Table 1 shows that the support for Slovakia's entry into the EU had an increasing tendency in the past twelve months. Pro-integration attitudes prevail at the moment: 70% of the citizens of Slovakia support the pro-EU foreign policy course, while only 20% disagree with it and 10% cannot take a position on this issue.

Support for the EU prevails among all demographic groups. However, the desire to join the EU is most strongly articulated by younger people, people with higher education, inhabitants of larger towns, including Bratislava and the entire Kosice region.

Table 6 shows that the support for the Slovak integration into the West is strongly differentiated according to political party support. The supporters of this goal are over represented among the supporters of the current governing coalition (SDK, SMK, SDL, SOP). Proponents of the integration strongly outnumber its opponents also among the potential voters of the new extra-parliamentary party SMER. The picture is quite different among the supporters of the current opposition parties. Among SNS voters, 55% supports EU membership and 39% disagrees with it, while only 47% of HZDS voters supports it and 47% opposes it.

Table 6

“Do you support the entry of Slovakia into the EU?” (responses according to political party support)

	Support (%)	Do not support (%)
SOP	95	5
SMK	93	2
SDK (SDKÚ, KDH, DU, DS, SDSS, SZS)	89	6
SDL	87	11
SMER	80	19
Undecided	68	12
Non-voters	65	17
SNS	55	39
HZDS	47	41

Note: “I don't know” responses account for the remainder (up to 100%).

Source: Institute for Public Affairs, March 2000

Table 1 illustrates that the support of the Slovak public for NATO membership has fluctuated in the past 18 months. While in January 1999 the proportions of supporters and opponents of NATO membership were approximately equal, in June 1999 the proportion of the supporters decreased and the proportion of the opponents significantly increased. Currently, the proportions of NATO supporters and opponents correspond to the levels from January 1999. Compared to the levels from June 1999 and October 1999, the proportion of the opponents of NATO membership decreased.

The widest opinion gap on NATO membership is between the people with elementary and college/university education, and between the youngest and the oldest generation. Table 7 shows that the biggest differentiation with respect to the support of NATO membership is based on the political party support. The strongest support can be found among the voters of SMK and SDK. The support is slightly lower among the voters of SOP and SDL, although even here the supporters outnumber the opponents. Among the supporters of SMER, 45 % agree with Slovakia's membership in NATO, while 53 % oppose it. Most opponents of NATO membership can be found within the ranks of HZDS and SNS voters.

Table 7

“Do you support the entry of Slovakia into NATO?” (responses according to political party support)

	Support (%)	Do not support (%)
SMK	79	12
SDKÚ, KDH, DU, DS, SDSS, SZS	74	19
SOP	59	39
SDE	51	40
SMER	45	53
Undecided	41	37
Non-voters	34	47
SNS	18	72
HZDS	17	71

Note: “I don’t know” responses account for the remainder (up to 100%).

Source: Institute for Public Affairs, March 2000

4. Conclusion

All these results demonstrate that the support for the integration of Slovakia into the EU and NATO is currently most influenced by political parties and their leaders. The political elites considerably influence the attitudes of ordinary citizens – their supporters or sympathizers – by their public statements and concrete political steps. A typical example can be found in the ambivalent attitudes of the SNS and HZDS leaders. During the most recent HZDS party convention, its chairman, Vladimir Mečiar, publicly declared his support for Slovakia’s integration into the West and specifically for Slovakia’s membership in NATO. However, how can an ordinary supporter of HZDS interpret the recent visit of several HZDS leaders to the Yugoslav president, Slobodan Milosevic, at the time of the first anniversary of the launch of NATO air strikes? After all, this visit amounted to a *de facto* expression of support and sympathy to the person who, according to the majority of the Slovak population, was most responsible for the tragedy of Albanian Kosovars.

This example only demonstrates the need for a wide social consensus on the most fundamental questions of foreign policy orientation of Slovakia, irrespective of political party support. However, such a consensus also requires consistency between the official foreign policy declaration and actual foreign policy. Slovakia’s integration ambitions also require a wide public and rational discussion on the importance of the integration into the Trans-Atlantic structures.

Moreover, the Slovak people have historically only shown little interest in foreign policy issues. After all, an ordinary citizen frequently does not understand the relationship between his country’s foreign policy orientation and its impact on his or her day-to-day life. If the support for the entry of Slovakia into NATO and EU is to increase and remain high, Slovak politicians must continuously explain this relationship to the wider public in clear and simple terms.

NATO's Image as Perceived by Slovak Politicians

(A qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews)

1. Methodological Approach

The research objective of this part of the project is to analyze the geo-political beliefs and attitudes held by representatives of Slovakia's political parties. It also investigates their perspectives on the Alliance's current position, its prospects for further enlargement, and Slovakia's chances for admission as well as factors that could affect, either benignly or adversely, the country's journey towards this goal. The interviews under analysis revisit the Kosovo crisis, allowing our respondents to voice their views regarding its impact on Slovak inhabitants' attitudes towards NATO and its enlargement plans.

Altogether, we have conducted 18 structured interviews, with individual political parties being represented as follows:

SDK, Slovak Democratic Coalition	7
SDL', Party of the Democratic Left	3
SMK, Party of Hungarian Coalition	2
SOP, Party of Civic Understanding	1
HZDS, Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	4
SNS, Slovak National Party	1

In selecting the respondents we have tried to represent assorted opinion streams inside individual political parties, as well as to survey younger politicians as prospective political elite members¹.

The interviews have been carried out by trained and experienced interviewers, who secured in advance their interviewees' consent to being asked questions and to the latter's orientation. The entire interviews were tape-recorded, so our analysis relies on their literal transcription with only minor linguistic corrections. We identify individual respondents simply by their partisan affiliation. The interviewees' names therefore have been omitted. To eliminate the identification of a given statement's author via respective gender-related words, we have employed throughout the text masculine pronouns with reference to both male and female respondents.

We applied a qualitative analysis method of the structured interviews in order to provide detailed and penetrative insight of Slovak prominent politicians' perceptions and arguments. Above all we asked to discover and display the widest possible scope of views and opinions on the issue at hand. The method applied is not suitable for any quantitative conclusions about separate representatives' views or attitudes.

¹ Respondents' list (in alphabetical order) and their position in the time of the survey: Lubomír Andrassy, MP and vice-chairman of SDE; Imrich Andrejčák, MP, HZDS, Minister of Defense in 1993-94; Gyula Bárdos, MP, SMK; Irena Belohorská, MP, HZDS, Minister of Healthcare in 1993-94; Ondrej Dostál, speaker, DS (part of SDK); Alojz Engliš, MP, HZDS; László Gyurovsky, MP, SMK; Pavol Hamžík, Vice-Premier for European Integration, SOP; Lubomír Harach, Minister of Economy, MP, chairman of DU (part of SDK); Eduard Chmelár, editor-in-chief of weekly "Slovo", close to SDE; Pavol Kanis, Minister of Defense, SDE; Oľga Keltošová, MP, HZDS, Minister of Labour in 1994-98; Daniel Lipšic, Director of the Office of Ministry of Justice and legal expert, KDH (part of SDK); Peter Muránsky, MP, KDH (part of SDK); Rafael Rafaj, spokesman, SNS; Martin Urmanič, Director of Medial Information Center, chairman of DU Youth branch (part of SDK); Jaroslav Volf, MP, chairman of SDSS (part of SDK). We also approached politicians, who, unfortunately, refused to be interviewed: Róbert Fico, former SDL MP, currently independent MP and founder of SMER party; Sergej Kozlík, MP, HZDS, Vice-Premier for Economy in 1994-98; Anna Malíková, chairwoman of SNS, MP; Marián Mesiarik, MP, SOP; Ján Sitek, MP, SNS, Minister of Defense in 1994-98; Rudolf Žiak, foreign policy expert of HZDS.

Interviews' scenario

NATO – its image, advantages, disadvantages, tasks and prospects

How do you feel about the current NATO? What assets and liabilities has it brought along? How do you see its future development? What are Alliance's tasks and prospects for the near decade?

What does NATO enlargement actually mean?

How would you assess the chances that NATO will accept further members? A case for and against, lessons drawn from the accession of the first three reforming countries. What is Slovakia's position? A time bracket of the next membership extension waves. How has Slovakia's national security been affected by the inclusion of the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary into NATO? What would be the benefits and the drawbacks of Slovakia's NATO membership?

What can affect Slovakia's NATO accession?

External factors (a modified approach towards the Alliance's enlargement, disappointment with newly embraced members, the overall situation within Europe, Russia's attitudes, etc.). Internal factors (public support, intrastate political instability – early elections and comeback of the previous ruling clique, etc.).

The crisis in Kosovo and NATO

The Kosovo crisis and its implications on NATO's enlargement, Slovakia's chances in the Alliance's membership extension process (in regard to the unambiguously enthusiastic stance of the SR government, is Slovakia as it is a de facto ally?), as well as regarding nation-wide debate on Slovakia's NATO entry and the Alliance's image.

2. Interpretation

2.1. NATO today: A value-oriented community or an organization at the crossroads?

Representatives of ruling coalition parties share a straightforwardly positive perception of present-day NATO. Specifically and most frequently, today's Alliance is viewed as the only effectively functioning system of collective defense; the only such system within European space, too; the only operational and authoritative defense institution that enjoys the support of the international community and is in a position to establish and promote democratic values and ideas. It has been repeatedly referred to in terms of **global security structure** and the pledge of global stability.

“NATO has ceased to represent the interests of just one part of the bipolar world, turning itself into an organization responsible for peace, order and stability across a sizeable part of the world.”

While the politicians' answers focus on the **security and military-defense aspect**, a simultaneous emphasis on the democratic world's values tints every statement. In the eyes of Slovak political figures within ruling parties, NATO is, above all, a community committed to safeguarding these common values of democracy, freedom, pluralism and protection of human rights.

“...this security structure enhances for its members a sense of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.”

This shift in accents in the wake of the demise of the bipolar world has been neatly captured by one of our respondents: *“NATO has transformed itself from a military and political arrangement into a political and military one.”*

While most of the politicians have referred to the Alliance's cultural and political values, some venture still further and speak in terms of cultural and civilization values like defense of Christendom and European Christian civilization.

“At the rational level, I perceive NATO – at present even more than I do the European Union – as an organization carrying certain values. These are the values of Western civilization, let's make it absolutely clear, not the values of Eastern civilization. They are the values of democracy, and freedom as well as these of the rule of law and

NATO; it's all-important that these values are defended and not subject to adverse influences, I mean aggressive influences of other cultures, whether an Eastern culture or, say, an Islamic one...."

Despite wide agreement on the fundamental attributes of the present-day Alliance among all the ruling parties' representatives, some SDL' (Party of the Democratic Left) respondents have displayed certain doubts as to NATO's political powers. At times, the Alliance is characterized as a very **exclusive** alignment, or '**elite**'. It is precisely this perception that feeds an effort towards the revision of relations between NATO and the UN, as well as raises the question of NATO's sense and functions after the end of the Cold War:

"To my mind, the whole thing has got only one negativity. This resides in the fact that the North Atlantic Alliance involves just sixteen member states, hence it is not the so-called inclusive international organization with more close links to the United Nations Organization; no surprise, then, the Alliance is not free of certain negative phenomena associated with the above indicated realities; that is, sixteen states take decisions on such sensitive issues as security, sovereignty and protection...."

"The North Atlantic Alliance, like the worldwide development at large, has actually found itself at the cross-roads before making up its mind; the point is the rationale of its existence in the era of the bipolar world, i.e. the world of the Warsaw Pact and the North Atlantic Alliance, is today gone for good, therefore it is necessary to define much more distinctly and in more detail what is our idea of the Alliance, what we would like to see NATO doing; whether we would like to see it as a constituent part of the United Nations or as a community of multiple nations"

"I'd rather the North Atlantic Alliance were a certain part of the United Nations Organization, i.e. that it were arched by this really unique and very significant organization; but this organization even today does not cover such ... areas as security, and it possesses very limited possibilities for applying political pressure in order to maintain peace the world over and across its regions; and as it turns out today, the North Atlantic Alliance could be one of such major institutional organizations capable of securing regional and world peace...."

In my opinion, NATO is of benefit to its members as an elite security club; I'm stressing this, as an elite security ... And this strategy of theirs makes me think ... in a way, of the Roman Empire with its capacity to maintain a certain degree of regional stability and civility which separated it from barbarity beyond. This association makes me watch NATO enlargement strategy with a modicum of skepticism, along with the fact that we still haven't got an answer to the question of where the boundaries of this enlargement will be, or where it is bound to stop...."

HZDS representatives have demonstrated a certain degree of **ambivalence** in their perception of NATO. On the one hand, there is there a rational acknowledgement of the Alliance's role in security terms, but on the other one; this is underpinned by a pronounced distance from this organization at personal and emotional levels. As with some SDL' representatives, HZDS respondents voiced their doubts about the Alliance's political remit along with vague hints at the possibility of its being 'abused'. It is necessary to emphasize in this context that it is exactly politicians' **personal positions** that serve as significant signals to their sympathizers in terms of knowing the values and opinions of the people they support.

"I publicly hold and promote a view that NATO is a helpful organization, actually the only reliably functioning security institution within Europe, and NATO per se gives no ground for dissatisfaction. Discontent would be occasionally generated by political decisions involving NATO as their instrument. "

"... so therefore my view of the present-day activity of the North Atlantic Alliance is not, alas and a pity, all that infelicitous."

"On the parliamentary floor, I've already said that I don't really have any position about that, nor about this organization; yes, I do accept it, as in light of certain activities NATO performed it proved to be a necessary arrangement."

"We perceive NATO, not only me but HZDS generally, as the only major and strong institution designed to defend World peace. Despite consistent reservations about NATO voiced by HZDS and myself in connection with the Alliance's bombardment of Kosovo, we do believe the Slovak Republic has no other chance."

The case against the Alliance argued by HZDS politicians primarily involves **challenging the necessity of NATO's presence in the present-day world**. A strong case against the Alliance has been supplied by its military

involvement in Yugoslavia, which we will return to later in this text. Its past record is unambiguously and irreversibly assessed as a historical contribution. This historical contribution, at that, is – whether wittingly or unconsciously – credited equally to the USA, their Western Allies and NATO.

“Everybody is aware of the Alliance’s role in the preservation of the balance of power, above all, following World War II, after the Yalta talks, after the events of 1948 and those connected with the division of Europe, and in the wake of the developments in Prague A different kettle of fish is, however, the North Atlantic Alliance’s role at a time when the Warsaw Pact on the opposite side is gone leaving actually nothing for NATO to balance”

A SNS representative has revealed a largely similarly structured perception. It is noteworthy that the Slovak National Party is the only political party in the Slovak parliament to have included the dismissal of Slovakia’s NATO membership in their program alongside the promotion of the country’s neutrality agenda.

“...there is no denying that NATO played a major role before the year 1989, until the fall of the Iron Curtain; in that era, the Alliance may well have prevented the eruption of many a conflict, be it a local one or normally the third world war sweeping the European continent.”

2. 2. The future of NATO: Enlargement, but when?

The Alliance’s future is closely linked to its enlargement. This step is perceived as a logical extension of its politics of the open door and admission into the Alliance, in the spring of 1999, of its first members from the ranks of former Warsaw Pact nations.

Yet the questions to be posed are **when** further admissions are envisaged, **how far** NATO will be extending in geographic terms as well as how NATO will be cooperating with Russia in order to get Russia involved in the global security architecture. Further enlargement steps are received overwhelmingly approvingly. Respondents tend to positively assess the Alliance’s key goals and its interest in inviting new members to join. But the time for NATO enlargement is a ground for skepticism encountered even among the advocates of Slovakia’s entry into NATO. To put it otherwise, there exists a clear political will for NATO membership. What remains unclear is when another enlargement step will happen.

“I do believe invitations of further countries are part of NATO plans, but I’m not so sure when it comes to the time period of their admission.”

“...they do keep the door open, but when another new member will approach it is, as I see it, still open as well; it looks like a matter of some four to five rather than that of one or two years.”

“Well, the originally announced enlargement waves will, in all likelihood, be postponed. To my mind, we are not going to see more of NATO enlargement any sooner than in some five years. The first countries recently granted NATO membership are in need of genuine integration, I believe, as new elements in the entirety of the Alliance’s established security doctrine. This is one thing. Another thing is that the rest of Central and Eastern Europe is still not free from an economic plight or political tensions which tend to alert the Alliance to enlargement pitfalls and, by and large, make NATO more cautious in extending its military influence. Thirdly, the launched NATO enlargement process needs to be subject to the condition, I think, that the Alliance’s military doctrine will be modified in the process.”

NATO prospects – these include: *“NATO enlargement, above all, in our region; then the Alliance’s effort to make sure that – following the admission of Slovakia, Slovenia and perhaps some other countries – security guarantees are extended to the Baltic states as well as towards the Ukraine; that could be very instrumental in the stabilization of relations to the east of our national border....”*

“Another major challenge to face is to ensure that current NATO members find a common language with Russia, that Russia and NATO abandon their politics of rivalry and incorporate present-day Eastern and Central European countries instead – whether as they are today or restructured in case of shifted national borders or other changes within eastern Europe. What is essential at this point is their ability to agree on a goal, which, in my opinion, could be the pursuit of Christian European civilization. The same applies to North America, Europe and Russia, and such a pact could be a defensive alliance of this Christian civilization.”

A sort of 'speculative' view is more common among SDL' and HZDS representatives, who tend to raise the problem of relations between NATO and the United Nations Organization. According to this view, the Alliance would be perceived as an organization covering **too few** nations. These speculations, however, would typically fail to articulate the preparedness for action of both arrangements. The parallels drawn would rather leave the United Nations as a commendable example to emulate. These statements often ritually feature the extrapolation of the famed stereotype of a 'big power', which dictates its conditions to minor states; therefore there is a really perceived need on the end of these small nations to have their weight reasonably increased. The respondents maintain that the key place among the Alliance's prospects belongs to the development of relations with the Ukraine and, of course, Russia, rather than with the countries of the Central European region.

*"I incline towards the thesis, which is not only mine in a sense ... in his book *The Grand Chessboard* Zbigniew Brezinski 'prophesied' that ... we would see the creation of some kind of a broader security mechanism. Brezinski calls it a trans-Euro-Asian security system, i.e., a system which would not only cover the Atlantic area, but also all the space up to Japan...."*

"My hope is that in its further development NATO will adjust itself to the trend common among the world's major international and transnational institutions such as, for example, the United Nations Organization, where small and medium-sized nations – in terms of geography, population figures and, also, geopolitics – have been playing an increasingly important role; that suggests that in the process of extending its membership the Alliance will have to take into account also a new candidate's geopolitical position – in the case of Slovakia, as well as the state of political affairs in Russia and political developments in the Ukraine, which happens to be our immediate neighbor."

"... if the weight, I mean the international weight, of this organization were to rise, it just has to keep enlarging through not only inviting European countries to enter but, in my opinion – if it seeks to maintain balance of power and peace the world over – also through incorporating nations of other continents. Thus acquired political weight could revamp NATO into a really important world arrangement for the promotion of peace. As it turns out, the local conflicts erupting and occurring today need not necessarily end just on the same territory or in its initial location. Spilt over, such conflicts not only may seriously threaten stability and peace on the continent concerned, but also throughout the whole world."

"As for me, at this point in time NATO would be better to focus its attention on the Ukraine. I don't mean membership; it's rather a matter of stabilization of this space. If the Ukraine made up its mind to enter NATO, their attention would be qualitatively different."

Voices explicitly challenging the Alliance's enlargement – due to, for example, **the lack of political will on the part of the United States** or because NATO enlargement is in principle viewed as a mistaken step, which aggravates the security of the region rather than stabilizes it, and, into the bargain, re-establishes the notorious bipolar Europe – are but very few. One cannot say, at the same time, that such views are not to be encountered at all among the representatives of parliamentary parties. That primarily holds for the SNS and, in a less explicit form, for SDL' and HZDS.

"Otherwise, from my point of view, there's no political will for the enlargement first of all on the part of the United States, and this is so because, if not for any other reason, in economic terms the US as it covers 98 percent of investment within the Central European space; this implies that, say, some tiny Slovakia would be for the States a burden rather than a direct difference or a positive impact also on the security of the United States or the Alliance as such." (SDL')

"Given that NATO does not cover or cannot cover the whole European space, we see its enlargement by three states, I mean in March, basically as pushing the former bipolar approach still further, which we qualify as a negativity and among potential sources for a plausible crisis. Because relations between Russia and NATO have not improved following the year 1989." (SNS)

2. 3. Slovakia's entry into NATO: pros and cons

Slovakia's NATO integration is one of the priorities of the incumbent Cabinet's foreign policy; hence it enjoys the support of the ruling coalition. The attitude of the voter most preferred opposition political subject, HZDS, towards this goal was quite ambivalent, even at the level of political declarations. The party's caucus in March of

2000 officially declared its support of the Slovak's Republic NATO membership. It would be right and fair to say that, overall, there does exist a broad consensus of Slovakia's political elite (at least at a declarative level) regarding the beneficial consequences of the country's entry into NATO. There is one exception, however; out of all parliamentary political parties, only the Slovak National Party favors an alternative security option – neutrality. But despite this steady consensus on the key goal of Slovak foreign policy, which has been unfailingly present, since 1994 (left intact even over the four years of Mečiar's rule), at the level of consciousness among members of Slovak political and social elite, cautions Martin Bútora in publication *Slovensko v šedej zóne?* (Slovakia in the gray zone?), there is no one-to-one correspondence between facts of consciousness and behavioral acts. "The years between 1994 and 1998 left us with the conviction that trying to estimate real political and social effort exerted towards set goals on a mere basis of proclaimed intents or government program declarations need not have sufficient prognostic drive." (Bútora 1998; 237-238)

By way of illustration, let's take a look at views shared by HZDS representatives, since in the case of respondents representing current ruling coalition parties the question "Into NATO: yes or no?" is no longer asked. Their attitudes are probed at the more structured level of finer nuance.

"I have repeatedly said and I'm doing so now that Slovakia's destiny lies within the EU and NATO, as NATO is this country's security organization. I'm convinced nobody is capable of creating either a better or more readily helpful security organization in Europe."

"NATO is an organization of a military nature designed to defend its territory against unwanted overall influences. What is at stake now for us is to become a constituent part of this system, which will be defending a system we live under. And this system of ours is a democratic one."

As in the year 1997, the only specifically mentioned alternative to NATO is **not co-operation with Russia, but neutrality** advocated and encouraged by the Slovak National Party:

"SNS ...proceeds from neutrality, or from the European dimension of tying up to the line created by Switzerland, Austria and Slovakia. We do think that if such a waterfront zone of neutral countries were created in Central Europe, which had become pointless to consider by now, occasional conflicts could be effectively prevented...."

The **advantages** of Slovakia's accession are clearly seen by all the respondents, and are highlighted even by those with halfhearted or purely pragmatic attitudes towards Slovakia's membership in the Alliance. The recognized advantages can be broken down into two major groups capable of being further subdivided – **security guarantees, and membership in the family of democratic and free nations**.

"The advantages are unambiguous, NATO is the only existing security system in Europe."

"The advantages are to be seen at three levels. If the stability of security is overarched by NATO, hand in hand with it goes also political stability and, I believe, economic stability as well. These three agencies are extremely important for any government endeavoring to join NATO."

Sometimes respondents cited in this context factors they interpreted as disadvantages as well as costs of the country's entry into NATO. These, in the final analysis, turn out to be Slovakia's advantages or gains. Most such reservations concern the state of our **army**, namely its technological equipment, modernization, and the soldiers' training.

"I would also add to the list of advantages the fact that we have ahead an inevitable modernization of our army, which, according to the Army of the Slovak Republic, will cost us as much as our NATO membership.... You can hardly refer to disadvantages where our would-be NATO membership will have raised the entire standard and effectiveness of our army.... It may well happen that somebody will take as a disadvantage the necessity to have learnt English or follow certain norms of conduct, or else the fact that the army will be subject to civilian control...."

Among the disadvantages of Slovakia's NATO membership is also **the loss of sovereignty** as a price paid for our integration in transnational arrangements. But the proponents of entry would treat this fact as something entirely natural, something, which would occur whenever a country joins a larger whole:

“Of course, it is a disadvantage, as in the case of EU membership, when, step by step, a nation sheds its sovereignty as an inevitable consequence of unification.”

Further disadvantages include **higher financial costs** and the potential deterioration of our relations with Russia and the Ukraine. But even these disadvantages have not been listed as reasons for Slovakia's refusal to enter NATO.

“Well, let's get over to the disadvantages. I assume that will affect state budget in a certain time period; now we may well have, but this is just my hypothetical question, a slightly soured relations with the Ukraine and Russia. True, the Ukraine shares our interest in joining NATO, but....”

2.4. What factors can affect Slovakia's admission into NATO?

Internal factors

In replying to the question about internal factors that might adversely affect Slovakia's entry into the Alliance, most respondents would cite stability, above all political **stability** and, yet more important, sustainable positive growth. In other words, stability in the sense of a 'stability of change' after the year 1989.

“That is primarily conditioned on the political regime Slovakia will be having in the years to come; on whether we'll succeed in maintaining and consolidating democratic government after the incumbent government is replaced by a further democratic cabinet emerging from competitive election I think it could be a fairly important signal for the NATO member-states. There exist, in my opinion, certain considerations to postpone a decision on Slovakia's integration or non-integration into NATO until after the next parliamentary election in the country – just to see if the aberration from a non-democratic rule in Slovakia was merely a matter of one-time choice of disappointed voters in the 1998 election or this is a steady trend to endure in the future.”

Many maintain that Slovakia's accession might be **threatened by an early parliamentary election** and comeback of the former ruling coalition (*“Mečiar's comeback could hamper the whole thing,” the same holding for the situation where “power will be in the hands of the political elite who put pro-Western orientation in question.”*).

Others insist that Slovakia will be invited for accession negotiations regardless of who will be governing the country. In the context of plausible upcoming internal political development in Slovakia, representatives of the current governing coalition parties argue that such a comeback *“is not real”*.

Political stability is not only understood in terms of the incumbent governing coalition's stability, but also as the formation of the established system of clearly defined political parties on the left-right continuum, or put otherwise, *“standardization of political scene”*. Internal political stability is joined by economic stability, which implies *“economic recovery, curbing corruption and clientelism, continuing privatization, more powers for local authorities and an increasingly more open society.”*

Yet Slovakia's NATO integration is not to come **automatically** even if the above-mentioned political change were not to occur.

“Much depends on which positions the incumbent democratic government will be presenting, as the democratic character of government cannot automatically guarantee Slovakia its entry into NATO.”

The **state of the army** makes up another subset of relevant factors. On the one hand, one cannot fail to feel a small glow of satisfaction with the good technical condition of our army, alongside the commendable education level of its members; on the other hand, if Slovakia joined NATO that would imply a major boost for the development of its army.

“...first comes the state of the army, where I would assess the status quite positively, though with a proviso that Slovakia's NATO integration and the on-going preparations for the accommodation of professionalism in our army and its passage into respective regime”

Public attitudes form the third subset of factors under analysis. And what is involved here is not merely actual public opinion. One of our respondents argues that:

“While the pressure of public opinion is important, it is by no means crucial. ‘In the light of Slovakia’s perception by western countries, the outcome of parliamentary election, the proportion of political parties that promote pro-western orientation to these that challenge – or even overtly dismiss – such a stance turns out to be by far more significant than any investigations into public opinion revealing the levels of support for or refusal to Slovakia’s NATO entry.”

At the same time, however: “...public opinion has to be tilted in favor should a referendum on the issue be held.”

In this perspective, many representatives have found integration-related information and **education delivered by the government insufficient**, and the same applies to the Slovak parliament; there’s a perceived lack of a clear-cut communication strategy, according to the respondents, and overall the government needs to launch a more vigorous pro-western campaign and the like.

“It should come first for political professionals to try and to convince ordinary citizens by way of assets flowing to their country from the integration in the North Atlantic Alliance; the wiser and more informed we are, the better choices we make. It is the responsibility of politicians to proceed like that and face the complexities of the issue head-on, instead of burying their heads in the sand in a hope that, after all, a pro-integration campaign launched a week before the final word on NATO entry will suffice to bend the popular sentiment in favor of the integration. No, such campaign needs to get started today and it needs to be a vigorous one; people deserve a full story that features both positive and negative aspects of the envisaged accession to NATO....”

“If we fail to prepare our citizens to adopt that and fail convince them of the necessity of this step – public opinion thus being not bent in favor of our integration – such a situation may hamper the integration process; the point is that in case of an integration plebiscite resulting in a majority vote against, the state as such may have difficulties with its official position which has to be presented abroad as well....”

External factors

Here primarily belong **developments in Russia, the Ukraine and the Balkans**, as well as the Alliance’s **experience with its new member states**, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.

A remarkably noteworthy view has come from the ranks of SNS in response to the question of which external factors may have an impact on Slovakia’s NATO acceptance or non-acceptance:

“To my mind, Hungary in particular may be interested in Slovakia’s becoming a NATO member as well; given its fairly widespread lobby, that would leverage – via a third party mediation, for example – pursuit of its national concerns and realization of their policy goals in the area of protection of the Hungarian ethnic minority in Slovakia....”

Within this group of factors also, and above all, belongs geo-political location of a given nation alongside the strategic interests of ‘the powerful’.

“As another factor to come under consideration may be ...a geo-political interest on behalf of the Alliance’s Supreme Command, because, as it turned out e.g. in the case of Serbia, in the very heart of Europe there’s a hole uncovered by NATO, which prevents the Alliance (of course, there’s another obstacle there presented by Austria) from effective action in the direction of the Balkans.”

“But the crucial factor that ...decides any country’s integration in the Alliance remains ...its political position, geo-political situation and general status.”

The above views have been largely presented by the representatives of opposition political parties. The externalistic bias of their argument is consistent with the logic of Vladimír Mečiar’s pronouncement to the effect that Slovakia will be invited to join the Alliance “due to its geo-political situation”. Similar parallels could be drawn in connection with the interpretation, in terms of external reasons², of Slovakia’s failure in the first round of NATO enlargement.

² By the interpretation of Slovakia’s failure in the round of NATO enlargement, respondents can be broken down into so-called “internalists” and “externalists”. The former see the reasons for the non-acceptance primarily inside the country while the latter try to find them abroad, i.e. beyond the mainstream political developments in Slovakia (for more detail, see Šebej-Vašečka-Nič, 1998)

Among the external factors is also a cultural-civilization argument, which insists that Slovakia just has always been part and parcel of this region, hence it does belong in the Trans-Atlantic structures:

“Slovakia and its people simply belong where they belong; where they belong is fundamental Christian civilization that has created for itself a security arrangement, NATO, and Slovakia simply belongs there.”

2.5. NATO's intervention in Kosovo – damage for NATO's image?

The Kosovo crisis and the Alliance's air raids against Yugoslavia have markedly affected the development of international relations in Europe, inspiring hot debates about the legitimacy of this military intervention carried out with the purpose to stop genocide against ethnic minorities in the region. This event, however, has gone far beyond the habitual framework of conflict between a defense community of democratic states honoring human rights as the supreme social value, on the one hand, and a non-democratic political regime notoriously known for violation of human rights, on the other. The Kosovo crisis has had serious implications for the intrastate development of many European nations, Slovakia included. Never before has any similar international event marked Slovakia's internal discourse and affected its internal development so perceptibly as NATO's military action against Yugoslavia; never before an international issue has caused such great conflict among individual political actors on the Slovak political scene. The greatest of these factors is the division (to the point of polarization) among main political actors over Slovakia's foreign policy issues as well as attempts on the part of some politicians to include the Kosovo crisis in their 'domestic agenda' (for more see Mesežnikov 2000: 13-14).

Because the Kosovo crisis has visibly affected not only the Slovak political scene, but also equally the nation's public opinion on the Alliance and citizens' attitudes towards it, we posed questions touching on this event in a qualitative interview as well.

The answers to the questions concerning the Kosovo crisis have revealed a whole spectrum of viewpoints, ranging from **straightforwardly approving** (these are the viewpoints upheld basically by representatives of the governing coalition parties such as SDK, SMK and SOP) up to **straightforwardly critical and dismissive** (the viewpoints voiced by the opposition HZDS and SNS representatives). Much similar attitudes are shared by a sizeable part of SDL' representatives. This distribution of pros and cons largely replicates the situation on the Slovak political scene as found before the NATO air attacks against Yugoslavia. At this point, it might be helpful to remember that there was not a consensus on the issue at the time when the Slovak Cabinet was negotiating the approval of opening the Slovak air space for NATO warplanes' overflights. Justice Minister J. Čarnogurský (KDH, Christian-Democratic Movement) and Agriculture Minister P. Koncoš (SDL') abstained from voting, two more ministers nominated by SDL', and P. Kanis and B. Schmögnerová, voted in favor despite the recommendations of their political party to vote against the adoption of the resolution allowing the overflights.

HZDS representatives unanimously criticize the Alliance's decision as mistaken and ineffective in terms of conflict management.

“Personally, I regard the decision of politicians to use NATO for managing the Kosovo crisis to be faulty and pre-mature”

“The use of force within this space was unfortunate. It is bound to adversely affect people's attitudes towards Kosovo, while having resolved nothing, rather, on the contrary, it has aggravated the crisis in a way....”

An other respondent representing HZDS has provided a more developed argument:

“I think, the NATO air strikes, the bombing of both military and civilian targets in Kosovo, have solved nothing, moreover they were in breach of international law and unauthorized by the UN. They mostly hit the civilian population in the already troubled region. Secondly, ethnic cleansing has not been stopped, it continues. And thirdly, NATO's intervention has actually helped the Yugoslav opposition and coalition pull their forces together to face the common enemy. This is unfortunate, as, in my opinion, a year ago the Yugoslav opposition had very real chances to overthrow Milošević's rule. So the bombing in Kosovo has, in political terms, missed its target. And finally something I would really blame on NATO representatives; actually, they actually are making things yet more complicated for politicians in central Europe and Slovakia, of course, as public opinion following the air strikes in Kosovo showed plummeting support for NATO, though we are anxious to secure our entry into the Alliance.”

The SR government's stance

Representatives of the ruling political parties were unanimous in the positive assessment of the responsive stance of the Slovak government during the crisis:

"...Government did what they ought to have done; in light of Slovakia's NATO integration drive, their stance was utterly legitimate".

"...this stance of theirs in the context of the Alliance's enlargement was in place; otherwise it would have been schizophrenic of us to aspire, on the one hand, to gain NATO membership, and on the other one, to be reluctant to do our bit ... in certain military measures".

"The Government's stance has proved productive in terms of improving Slovakia's relations in the military and economic areas. It has been a good decision."

The viewpoints shared by the representatives of SDK and SOP added two more elements:

1. Government's position during the Kosovo crisis alone does not qualify Slovakia for actual entry into NATO; and
2. Criticisms to the Government's address for having been all too responsive to NATO's appeals.

"Despite having eagerly demonstrated our willingness, I think we will have to do a lot to meet the criteria required...."

"...Slovakia's position was extremely responsive, even perhaps too responsive, to NATO's appeals in the case of Kosovo, when we convened an extraordinary government session, when we received the communication from Brussels, it must have been a request for making our skies available for the overflights ...I'm not sure if that was the very best response."

From SDL' ranks there were 'disappointed' voices of those hurt by insufficient 'appreciation' of the Government's position:

"...I perceived these positive decisions as a clear signal given to the North Atlantic Alliance, as Slovakia's major step ahead towards its goal. This also accounts for my surprise at the decision adopted by the Washington Summit, I mean we received no clear signal"

Respondents representing HZDS have challenged the action of the SR government, criticized its too 'servile' and responsive attitude towards NATO, which has finally received inadequate recognition:

"...and lastly Government (decided) hastily, not bothering to stick to the formal parliamentary procedure and, in fact, unduly appropriating the right to take such a decision, which stirred severe criticisms in its wake..."

"So this type of servility meant to be praised for having been so awfully eager to serve is not what I see as right."

"In this connection I also think that Premier Dzurinda acted very much on impulse and prematurely when he hastily agreed to allow NATO warplanes' overflights in return for just a couple of shoulder taps and as many snaps for Slovakia, but not even a hint at – let alone a promise of – the time bracket considered for the Slovak Republic."

Kosovo and NATO's image

Given the impact of the Kosovo crisis on public perceptions of the Alliance and Slovakia's aspired membership in it, we have asked our respondents to present their perspective of the issue. Overall, the prevalent view is that the damaging impact of the Kosovo crisis on NATO's image was merely temporary, if at all.

"NATO's image was tarred, though, I feel bound to say, but for a short while."

"... I don't think that could reverse the whole trend or orientation...of either the political elite or general public in their pro-western drive, hence in their orientation towards integration in the North Atlantic Alliance, ...again, I'd like to take a more distanced look at that, taking not as decisive any on-going surveys that deliver actual figures claiming that the number of NATO integration detractors is at the moment higher than that of its sympathizers."

"In the final run, I think that the war in Kosovo has not affected the overall image of NATO."

3. Conclusion

Apart from rare exceptions, positive perception clearly prevails among the Slovak political elite. The image of NATO turns out to be less characterized by a military pact and more and more dominated by the image of a community committed to safeguarding democratic values of the Western world. There is a political consensus within the governmental coalition about Slovakia's orientation towards NATO. Also the strongest opposition party officially declares its support of Slovakia's NATO entry. However, the majority of its constituency is against this objective. The qualitative analysis revealed that certain ambiguity could be observed in the views of HZDS leaders. On the one hand, there is a rational acknowledgement of the Alliance's necessity for future security of Slovakia, on the other one; it is underpinned by a pronounced personal and emotional distance from this organization. It needs to be emphasized in this context that it is precisely politicians' **personal positions** that serve as significant signals to their sympathizers in terms of knowing the values and opinions of the people they support.

Some SDL' respondents have displayed certain doubts as to NATO's political powers, along with vague hints at the possibility of these powers being 'abused'. However, within the SDL such voices are overpowered by the strong and clear pro-Euro-Atlantic position of Minister of Defense Pavol Kanis. The question is which opinion will win within the party.

The discussion about the **pros and cons of Slovakia's NATO entry** began to be more structured. The internal factors of Slovakia's preparedness to enter NATO can be divided into three groups: 1. Political and economic stability, 2. Military aspects and army readiness, and 3. General public's support. The benefits highly outweigh the deficits for all respondents even among those who have only pragmatically view on NATO accession. The benefits can be placed into two main categories – **guarantees of security and membership in a big family of democratic countries**.

The crisis in Kosovo marked Slovakia's internal discourse and caused great confrontation among political actors in the Slovak political scene. The answers to the questions concerning the Kosovo crisis have revealed a whole spectrum of viewpoints, ranging from **straightforwardly approving** (these are the viewpoints upheld basically by representatives of the governing coalition parties such as SDK, SMK and SOP) up to **straightforwardly critical and dismissive** (the viewpoints voiced by the opposition HZDS and SNS representatives). However, even the governmental coalition was not unified in its views. The opponents of NATO air campaign use the further development in Kosovo as an argument, which verifies their former criticism. This was mentioned several times in the interviews (also by the representatives of governmental coalition parties) that the extraordinary responsive attitude of the Slovak Government towards NATO (it acted as a *de-facto* ally) was not adequately recognized by Washington.

The negative impact of the Kosovo crisis on public perceptions of the Alliance and Slovakia's aspired membership is generally regarded as limited and merely temporary. The recent public opinion polls prove this assumption – the support for the Slovakia's NATO entry started is recovering slowly but constantly. However, the Kosovo crisis represents a model situation that could repeat. In spring 1999 the Slovak political representation did not sufficiently communicate with the public nor sufficiently explain the reasoning behind its decision. The challenge now, not only for the government but also for everyone who wants Slovakia will join NATO one day, is to improve the population's knowledge about the Alliance and its role in enhancing security ten years after the end of the Cold War.

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